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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003148

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: FINALLY, SIX IRAQI AMBASSADOR APPOINTMENTS TO
REGIONAL STATES

REF: A. DAMASCUS 657
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2366

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Robert Ford. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: While Foreign Minister Zebari has been in New York, the Prime Minister's office announced the pending retirement of two dozen members of the Iraqi MFA and the Prime Ministry also named six ambassadors to states in the region. The naming of six ambassadors is an important gesture to key neighbors like Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey. The announcements here were poorly coordinated, however, and the senior MFA official in Baghdad, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi, told us September 29 that the MFA hadn't even yet asked for agreement for the ambassadors nominated yet. It will be some time for them to arrive in capitals, therefore. Meanwhile, among the those on the retirement list is another deputy foreign minister, Mohamed Hajj Hamoud, who has played a major role in the SOFA negotiations. His status also is not entirely clear. End Summary.

Shake Up at the MFA

[1](#)2. (SBU) The long argument between Prime Minister Maliki and Foreign Minister Zebari over key diplomatic appointments has taken a new turn in recent days, although the true situation is not entirely clear. Iraqi media outlets reported September 26 that Maliki took advantage of Zebari's absence from Baghdad (he's currently in New York at the UNGA) to dismiss 25 Iraqi Ambassadors and senior MFA officials from their positions. These include Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammed Haj Hamoud (currently with Zebari in New York and a key player in the ongoing SOFA negotiations), as well as Iraq's ambassadors to Australia, Austria, Bahrain and Pakistan. Subsequently, Labeed Abbawi, one of Iraq's other Deputy Foreign Ministers (there are three), issued a press statement denying these reports and stating that the MFA had not received any such directive.

[1](#)3. (C) In a September 29 conversation with PMIN, Abbawi provided some clarification. He said that the 25 (including Haj Hamoud) have been on a list the MFA had drawn up earlier this year of officials who had reached the mandatory retirement age. Prime Minister Maliki had been pressing Foreign Minister Zebari for some time to enforce the mandatory retirement requirement and Zebari had resisted. With the September 26 public announcement, the Prime Minister apparently decided to force the issue. Abbawi said the action is not immediately effective and it is unclear when it actually will be implemented (although it could be soon). The names on the list have not been made public, he added, and even are not known within the MFA. While there is a broader political context to this, Abbawi said the action itself was not purely political as those effected truly are of

retirement age.

Finally, Iraq Names (Some) Ambassadors to Arab Countries

14. (SBU) GOI spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh announced September 28 that the cabinet had named ambassadors to Syria (Ala'a Jowadi), Saudi Arabia (Ghanem al-Jumaili), Qatar (Jawad al-Hindawi), Bahrain (Abdul Amir Abu Tubaik), Lebanon (Omar al-Barzanji) and Turkey (Muez al-Khatib). While Iraq has had ambassadors in Bahrain, Lebanon and Turkey, the naming of ambassadors to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Syria represents an upgrading of ties. Iraq, until now, had been represented at the Charge d' Affaires level in those countries. The naming of an Iraqi Ambassador to Syria comes on the heels of Damascus' September 16 announcement of its ambassador to Iraq (Ref A).

15. (C) In the same September 29 conversation noted above, Deputy Foreign Minister Abbawi related that the MFA was embarrassed that al-Dabbagh had announced the names before the MFA had informed capitals or obtained agreement. However, the decision does represent a compromise between the PM's office and the MFA. Four of the names had been on the list of six FM Zebari had presented to PM Maliki in the Spring and which had been the focus of disagreement between them since then. In the end, Maliki agreed to four of Zebari's choices and Zebari agreed to two of Maliki's. (Abbawi did not specify who fell into which column.) As all six are already of ambassadorial rank,

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Abbawi stated that they will not need parliamentary approval and could be dispatched as soon as Iraq receives agreement. Deputy Prime Minister Salih, however, told the Ambassador September 29 that they would need parliamentary approval.

16. (C) One mid-level source at the MFA told us September 29 that Tibeekh, Jawadi, Hindawi and Khatib all left Iraq during the Saddam regime and returned after the regime's fall. Barzanji, who comes from a prominent Kurdish clan, was in Kurdistan during Saddam's regime. Jumaili is a career diplomat who was in the MFA during the Saddam period and most recently has been ambassador to Japan.

Comment

17. (C) We will need to confirm about the need for parliamentary approval or not for these men to go out to post, and in any case the MFA has to secure agreement first. We therefore expect it will be some time before they arrive in capitals. That said, the naming of the six ambassadors is big step towards breaking the months-long standoff between Prime Minister Maliki and Foreign Minister Zebari over naming ambassadors to regional states. However, the fact that the PM's office chose to announce the appointments without coordinating with the MFA, that two days earlier it had leaked the MFA's retirement list in a manner that made it appear that a mass dismissal had taken place, and that all this was done while Zebari was out of the country speaks volumes to the bad blood between the two. As we have reported previously (Ref B), Zebari has grown increasingly frustrated with Maliki, and the feeling is mutual.

18. (C) In a recent conversation with us, Zebari intimated that he himself may retire by the end of the year. While he has not revealed all the factors that are weighing on him,

weariness after five years serving as post-Saddam Iraq's first and only Foreign Minister and his increasing sense of marginalization certainly would be among them.

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